PM to be asked for priority action

Power crisis in Karachi severe: Gohar

Bureau Report

ISLAMABAD, Dec 31: Minister for Water and Power Gohar Ayub Khan on Thursday feared a serious power crisis in Karachi in the near future because of sharp reduction in supply to that city.

Mr Khan said he would request the prime minister to attach more importance to the power crisis than to the law and order situation in Karachi when the latter would be visiting the city in the coming days.

Responding to a volley of questions in the National Assembly during question hour, the minister also warned the members that the worst-ever water crisis in the country was approaching because of unstopped silting in the country's reservoirs.

"In 15 to 20 years time severe water crisis will develop in the country because of reduction in storage capacity of the water reservoirs," the minister said. Mr Khan added that the country immediately needed more water reservoirs to avoid the inevitable.

The minister disclosed that 30 per cent of Tarbela's storage capacity had already been reduced due to silting. "There is a 132-feet high mound of sand in Tarbela Dam, which is increasing with the passage of time," he said, adding that this was a matter of concern for all the provinces because they would not be able to get their share of water after 15 to 20 years.

The reduction in storage capacity will also, result in the shortage of electricity generation.

On the proposal of buying a nuclear power plant to overcome the shortage, he said, no country was ready to provide it to Pakistan on credit. He said France would not sell it to Pakistan but China would do it only if cash payment was made.

The minister admitted that WAPDA's grids and transformers were in very bad shape and the authority needed Rs11 billion to replace them.

Dispelling the impression that the induction of army would be another burden on WAPDA, he said, the new management intended to save Rs9 to 10 billion annually only by checking pilferage, corruption and maladministration in the authority.

Spelling out the measures adopted by the authority to control the power pilferage, he said, the steps being taken to this effect included monitoring of feeder-wise losses and combing of high-loss feeders, monitoring of industrial consumers through bulk metering panel, installation of check meter on high consumption transforms, elimination of tie-up meters and proper fixing and grouting of loose meters,

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increasing surveillance and monitoring by special campaign for eradication of tampering by steel furnaces, and incentive package for reporting theft.

To a question by Mian Muhammad Munir about the installation of electricity meters in tribal areas, the minister disclosed that the meters were being installed at industrial units, commercial users and government institutions in FATA.

He added that the government was in consultation with NWFP governor, parliamentarians belonging to FATA and the government authorities to make the private consumers in tribal areas, also ready to pay for the electricity. He, however, said the government was complacent towards the private consumers and did not want any stringent action.

The minister also ruled out any possible reduction in electricity tariff. To a question by Prof A K Shams, the minister said 1,494 villages would be provided with electricity during the financial year 1998-99.

In response to a question about the IPPs asked by Syed Naveed Qamar, the minister said a total of 8 IPPs had so far settled the matter of tariff reduction with the government. He added that negotiations with other IPPs were in progress. Denying that the government intended to cancel all other contracts, he said, the government intended to treat all projects on merit. "Only those projects will be terminated which have violated the agreements catered upon with the government of Pakistan."